

# HOW I BECAME A SOCIALIST

HELEN KELLER'S  
ARTICLES



HELEN KELLER



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*How I became a Socialist – by Helen Keller  
(Collection of Helen Keller's works)*

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# The Socialist Legacy of Helen Keller

## An Introduction to the Writings of Helen Keller

Many hearing people, Marxists included, are familiar with Helen Keller in one of two ways. Either we see her as the wild child rescued from the prison of deafness and blindness through the heroic efforts of her "miracle worker" teacher, Anne Sullivan; or as the butt of cruel "Helen Keller" jokes. Neither image bears any relation to the actual, politically active Deaf/Blind woman whom that nearly mythical child became.

In these texts, she explains how she came to Revolutionary Socialism after her graduation from college. Despite her reliance on intermediaries to communicate with the outside world, Comrade Helen Keller is fully her own person.

Helen Keller became a member of the Socialist Party in 1909 and by 1912, she had become a national voice for socialism and working class solidarity. Her articles and speeches take on a harder edge as the war machine gears up and the reformist tendency in

the Socialist Party forced a split with its revolutionary wing. We can see her calling for party unity in 1913, and then breaking publically with reformism and siding wholeheartedly with the IWW in 1916 and taking up the struggle against President Wilson's hypocritical war machine.

Helen Keller's work for the cause of socialist revolution continued through the years of the First World War up until 1921. She had been long active in efforts to reduce the causes of blindness and provide relief for the Blind. With the collapse of the Socialist Party's commitment to revolution and the on-going persecution of the IWW, Keller lost her connections to the workers movement and became increasingly isolated among reformers and government bureaucrats who did not share her political perspectives.

Her own self image was that of a Blind woman who also could not hear. Helen Keller never learned the sign language of the North American Deaf community. Instead she had English sentences manually spelled into her hand and then vocalized her responses. This effectively cut her off from the largely working class Deaf population whose native sign language has a grammar all its own. Blindness at that time often meant unemployment, whereas Deaf workers were integrated into the largely non-English speaking ranks of manual laborers.

One can only wonder what might have been if Comrade Keller had found a place in the ranks of politically unorganised Deaf workers in the heady years of the late '20s and '30s.

Sadly, her legacy among Deaf and Deaf/Blind people today is one of opposition to their native language rights. Her name stands for the dominance of spoken English over American Sign Language. This is due to her family's early contact with Alexander Graham Bell and his campaign to wipe out manual communication in favor of the oral education of the Deaf. Her legacy in the larger hearing world today is one of the saccharine sweet triumphs of the individual over personal adversity (with the help of a determined educator-hero). Gone is her call for international working-class solidarity and her clear revolutionary vision. Hopefully, this small archive will go some way to recapturing her socialist legacy for the Deaf, Deaf/Blind and hearing workers of the world.

Helen Keller Reference Archive

Published by: LeoPard Books India



# How I Became a Socialist

For several months my name and socialism have appeared often together in the newspapers. A friend tells me that I have shared the front pages with baseball, Mr. Roosevelt and the New York police scandal. The association does not make me altogether happy but, on the whole, I am glad that many people are interested in me and in the educational achievements of my teacher, Mrs. Macy (Anne Sullivan). Even notoriety may be turned to beneficent uses, and I rejoice if the disposition of the newspapers to record my activities results in bringing more often into their columns the word Socialism.

In the future I hope to write about socialism, and to justify in some measure the great amount of publicity which has been accorded to me and my opinions. So far I have written little and said little about the subject. I have written a few letters, notably one to Comrade Fred Warren which was printed in the Appeal to Reason. I have talked to some reporters, one of whom, Mr. Ireland of the New York World, made a very flattering report and gave fully and fairly what I said. I have never been in Schenectady. I have never met Mayor Lunn. I have never had a letter from

him, but he has sent kind messages to me through Mr. Macy. Owing to Mrs. Macy's illness, whatever plans I had to join the workers in Schenectady have been abandoned.

On such negative and relatively insignificant matters have been written many editorials in the capitalist press and in the Socialist press. The clippings fill a drawer. I have not read a quarter of them, and I doubt if I shall ever read them all. If on such a small quantity of fact so much comment has followed, what will the newspapers do if I ever set to work in earnest to write and talk in behalf of socialism? For the present I should like to make a statement of my position and correct some false reports and answer some criticisms which seem to me unjust.

First — How did I become a Socialist? By reading. The first book I read was Wells' New World for Old. I read it on Mrs. Macy's recommendation. She was attracted by its imaginative quality, and hoped that its electric style might stimulate and interest me. When she gave me the book, she was not a Socialist and she is not a Socialist now. Perhaps she will be one before Mr. Macy and I am done arguing with her.

My reading has been limited and slow. I take German bimonthly Socialist periodicals printed in braille for the blind. (Our German

comrades are ahead of us in many respects.) I have also in German braille Kautsky's discussion of the Erfurt Program. The other socialist literature that I have read has been spelled into my hand by a friend who comes three times a week to read to me whatever I choose to have read.

The periodical which I have most often requested her lively fingers to communicate to my eager ones is the National Socialist. She gives the titles of the articles and I tell her when to read on and when to omit. I have also had her read to me from the International Socialist Review articles the titles of which sounded promising. Manual spelling takes time. It is no easy and rapid thing to absorb through one's fingers a book of 50,000 words on economics. But it is a pleasure, and one which I shall enjoy repeatedly until I have made myself acquainted with all the classic socialist authors.

In the light of the foregoing I wish to comment on a piece about me which was printed in the Common Cause and reprinted in the Live Issue, two antisocialist publications. Here is a quotation from that piece:

"For twenty-five years Miss Keller's teacher and constant companion has been Mrs. John Macy, formerly of Wrentham, Mass. Both Mr. and Mrs. Macy are

enthusiastic Marxist propagandists, and it is scarcely surprising that Miss Keller, depending upon this lifelong friend for her most intimate knowledge of life, should have imbibed such opinions."

Mr. Macy may be an enthusiastic Marxist propagandist, though I am sorry to say he has not shown much enthusiasm in propagating his Marxism through my fingers. Mrs. Macy is not a Marxist, nor a socialist. Therefore what the Common Cause says about her is not true. The editor must have invented that, made it out of whole cloth, and if that is the way his mind works, it is no wonder that he is opposed to socialism. He has not sufficient sense of fact to be a socialist or anything else intellectually worthwhile.

Consider another quotation from the same article. The headline reads:

"SCHENECTADY REDS ARE ADVERTISING; USING HELEN KELLER, THE BLIND GIRL, TO RECEIVE PUBLICITY."

Then the article begins:

"It would be difficult to imagine anything more pathetic than the present exploitation of poor Helen Keller by the Socialists of Schenectady. For weeks the party's press agencies have heralded the fact that she is a Socialist, and is about to become

a member of Schenectady's new Board of Public Welfare."

There's a chance for satirical comment on the phrase, "the exploitation of poor Helen Keller." But I will refrain, simply saying that I do not like the hypocritical sympathy of such a paper as the Common Cause, but I am glad if it knows what the word "exploitation" means.

Let us come to the facts. When Mayor Lunn heard that I might go to Schenectady he proposed to the Board of Public Welfare that a place be kept on it for me. Nothing was printed about this in The Citizen, Mayor Lunn's paper. Indeed, it was the intention of the board to say nothing about the matter until after I had moved to Schenectady. But the reporters of the capitalist press got wind of the plan, and one day, during Mayor Lunn's absence from Schenectady, the Knickerbocker Press of Albany made the announcement. It was telegraphed all over the country, and then began the real newspaper exploitation. By the Socialist press? No, by the capitalist press.

The Socialist papers printed the news, and some of them wrote editorials of welcome. But The Citizen, Mayor Lunn's paper, preserved silence and did not mention my name during all the weeks when the reporters were telephoning and telegraphing and asking for interviews. It was the capitalist press that

did the exploiting. Why? Because ordinary newspapers care anything about socialism? No, of course not; they hate it. But because I, alas, am a subject for newspaper gossip. We got so tired of denying that I was in Schenectady that I began to dislike the reporter who first published the "news."

The Socialist papers, it is true, did make a good deal of me after the capitalist papers had "heralded the fact that I am a Socialist." But all the reporters who came to see me were from ordinary commercial newspapers. No Socialist paper, neither The Call nor the National Socialist, ever asked me for an article. The editor of The Citizen hinted to Mr. Macy that he would like one, but he was too fine and considerate to ask for it point-blank.

The New York Times did ask me for one. The editor of the Times wrote assuring me that his paper was a valuable medium for reaching the public and he wanted an article from me. He also telegraphed asking me to send him an account of my plans and to outline my ideas of my duties as a member of the Board of Public Welfare of Schenectady.

I am glad I did not comply with this request, for some days later the Times made me a social outcast beyond the range of its righteous sympathies. On September 21 there appeared in the Times an editorial called "The

Contemptible Red Flag." I quote two passages from it:

"The flag is free. But it is none the less detestable. It is the symbol of lawlessness and anarchy the world over, and as such is held in contempt by all right-minded persons."

"The bearer of a red flag may not be molested by the police until he commits some act which the red flag justifies. He deserves, however, always to be regarded with suspicion. By carrying the symbol of lawlessness he forfeits all right to respect and sympathy."

I am no worshiper of cloth of any color, but I love the red flag and what it symbolizes to me and other Socialists. I have a red flag hanging in my study, and if I could I should gladly march with it past the office of the Times and let all the reporters and photographers make the most of the spectacle. According to the inclusive condemnation of the Times I have forfeited all right to respect and sympathy, and I am to be regarded with suspicion.

Yet the editor of the Times wants me to write him an article! How can he trust me to write for him if I am a suspicious character? I hope you will enjoy as much as I do the bad ethics, bad logic, and bad manners that a

capitalist editor falls into when he tries to condemn the movement which is aimed at this plutocratic interests. We are not entitled to sympathy, yet some of us can write articles that will help his paper to make money. Probably our opinions have the same sort of value to him that he would find in the confession of a famous murderer. We are not nice, but we are interesting.

I like newspapermen. I have known many, and two or three editors have been among my most intimate friends. Moreover, the newspapers have been of great assistance in the work which we have been trying to do for the blind. It costs them nothing to give their aid to work for the blind and to other superficial charities. But socialism — ah, that is a different matter! That goes to the root of all poverty and all charity. The money power behind the newspapers is against socialism, and the editors, obedient to the hand that feeds them, will go to any length to put down socialism and undermine the influence of socialists.

When my letter to Comrade Fred Warren was published in the Appeal to Reason, a friend of mine who writes a special department for the Boston Transcript made an article about it and the editor-in-chief cut it out.

The Brooklyn Eagle says, apropos of me, and socialism, that Helen Keller's "mistakes spring out of the manifest limitations of her development." Some years ago I met a gentleman who was introduced to me as Mr. McKelway, editor of the Brooklyn Eagle. It was after a meeting that we had in New York in behalf of the blind. At that time the compliments he paid me were so generous that I blush to remember them.

But now that I have come out for socialism he reminds me and the public that I am blind and deaf and especially liable to error. I must have shrunk in intelligence during the years since I met him. Surely it is his turn to blush. It may be that deafness and blindness incline one toward socialism. Marx was probably stone deaf and William Morris was blind. Morris painted his pictures by the sense of touch and designed wall paper by the sense of smell.

Oh, ridiculous Brooklyn Eagle! What an ungallant bird it is! Socially blind and deaf, it defends an intolerable system, a system that is the cause of much of the physical blindness and deafness which we are trying to prevent. The Eagle is willing to help us prevent misery provided, always provided, that we do not attack the industrial tyranny which supports it and stops its ears and clouds its vision. The

Eagle and I are at war. I hate the system which it represents, apologizes for and upholds.

When it fights back, let it fight fair. Let it attack my ideas and oppose the aims and arguments of Socialism. It is not fair fighting or good argument to remind me and others that i cannot see or hear. I can read. I can read all the socialist books I have time for in English, German and French.

If the editor of the Brooklyn Eagle should read some of them, he might be a wiser man and make a better newspaper. If I ever contribute to the Socialist movement the book that I sometimes dream of, I know what I shall name it: Industrial Blindness and Social Deafness.

*First Published: the New York Call , November 3,  
1912 Source: Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years  
(International Publishers, 1967)*

# A Call For Harmony

Editor of the Call:

It is with the deepest regret that I have read the attacks upon Comrade Haywood which have appeared in the National Socialist. It fills me with amazement to see such a narrow spirit, such an ignoble strife between two factions which should be one, and that, too, at a most critical period in the struggle of the proletariat.

What? Are we to put difference of party tactics before the desperate needs of the workers? Are we know better than the capitalist politicians who stand in the high places and harangue about petty matters, while millions of the people are underpaid, underfed, thrown out of work and dying? While countless women and children are breaking their hearts and ruining their bodies in long days of toil, we are fighting one another. Shame upon us! The enemy is at our very doors, and the hand of the destroyer does its fell work, while we leave the victims helpless, because we think more of our own theories — theories that have not even been tested!

It is well for us to disagree and discuss our differences fully and vigorously. But it is

to make the issues personal. If the points of controversy are ever so weighty, they are not so great as to justify the mischief which springs from the quarrels of comrades. How can the workers, whom we urge to unite, look to us Socialists for guidance if we fail to unite?

What are we organized for? What is our chief bond of unity? What is our avowed object? The welfare of the working class and the abolition of capitalism. By our fidelity to the working class and to our ultimate purpose we are to be tested. Our rise or fall depends not upon theories of party tactic, but upon what we do or fail to do in the practical contest. There are many ways to work for the coming of the Cooperative Commonwealth.

But those who hope for that commonwealth and work for it, those who are on the workers' side of the battle are our comrades. They can never cease to be our comrades, even though they withdraw from our party, or are dismissed from our party. We are the friends of all who serve the workers, of all who labor for the social revolution, for the uplifting and enlightenment of all men. When will the champions of the oppressed unite, and thus hasten the day of deliverance?

*First Published:* New York Call, January 4, 1913  
*Source:* Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years (International Publishers, 1967)

# Why Men Need Woman Suffrage

Many declare that the woman peril is at our door. I have no doubt that it is. Indeed, I suspect that it has already entered most households. Certainly a great number of men are facing it across the breakfast table. And no matter how deaf they pretend to be, they cannot help hearing it talk.

Women insist on their "divine rights," "immutable rights," "inalienable rights." These phrases are not so sensible as one might wish. When one comes to think of it, there are no such things as divine, immutable or inalienable rights. Rights are things we get when we are strong enough to make good our claim to them. Men spent hundreds of years and did much hard fighting to get the rights they now call divine, immutable and inalienable. Today women are demanding rights that tomorrow nobody will be foolhardy enough to question.

Anyone that reads intelligently knows that some of our old ideas are up a tree, and that traditions are scurrying away before the advance of their everlasting enemy, the questioning mind of a new age. It is time to take a good look at human affairs in the light

of new conditions and new ideas, and the tradition that man is the natural master of the destiny of the race is one of the first to suffer investigation.

The dullest can see that a good many things are wrong with the world. It is old-fashioned, running into ruts. We lack intelligent direction and control. We are not getting the most out of our opportunities and advantages. We must make over the scheme of life, and new tools are needed for the work.

Perhaps one of the chief reasons for the present chaotic condition of things is that the world has been trying to get along with only half of itself. Everywhere we see running to waste woman-force that should be utilized in making the world a more decent home for humanity. Let us see how the votes of women will help solve the problem of living wisely and well.

When women vote men will no longer be compelled to guess at their desires--and guess wrong. Women will be able to protect themselves from man-made laws that are antagonistic to their interests. Some persons like to imagine that man's chivalrous nature will constrain him to act humanely toward woman and protect her rights. Some men do protect some women. [We demand that all

women have the right to protect themselves and relieve man of this feudal responsibility.

Political power shapes the affairs of state and determines many of the every-day relations of human beings with one another. The citizen with a vote is master of his own destiny. Women without this power, and who do not happen to have "natural protectors," are at the mercy of man-made laws. And experience shows that these laws are often unjust to them. Legislation made to protect women who have fathers and husbands to care for them does not protect working women whose only defenders are the state's policemen.

The wages of women in some states belong to their fathers or their husbands. They cannot hold property. In parts of this enlightened democracy of men the father is the sole owner of the child. I believe he can even will away the unborn babies. Legislation concerning the age of consent is another proof that the voice of woman is mute in the halls of the lawmakers. The regulations affecting laboring women are a proof that men are too busy to protect their "natural wards."

Economic urgencies have driven women to demand the vote. To a large number of women is entrusted the vitally important public function of training all

childhood. Yet it is frequently impossible for teachers to support themselves decently on their wages. What redress have these overworked, underpaid women without the vote? They count for nothing politically.

An organization of women recently wanted to obtain a welfare measure from a Legislature in New York. A petition signed by 5,000 women was placed before the chairman of a committee that was to report on the bill. He said it was a good bill and ought to pass. After the women had waited a reasonable time, they sent up a request to know what had become of the bill. The chairman said he did not know anything about it. He was reminded of the petition that had been brought to him signed by 5,000 women. "Oh," replied the chairman, "a petition signed by 5,000 women is not worth the paper it is written on. Get five men to sign and we'll do something about it." That is one reason we demand the vote--we want 5,000 women to count for more than five men.

A majority of women that need the vote are wage-earners. A tremendous change has taken place in the industrial world since power machines took the place of hand tools. Men and women have been compelled to adjust themselves to a new system of production and distribution. The machine has been used to

exploit the labor of both men and women as it was never exploited before. In the terrific struggle for existence that has resulted from this change women and children suffer even more than men. Indeed, economic pressure drives many women to market their sex.

Yet women have nothing to say about conditions under which they live and toil. Helpless, unheeded, they must endure hardships that lead to misery and degradation. They may not lift a hand to defend themselves against cruel, crippling processes that stunt the body and brain and bring on early death or premature old age.

Working men suffer from the helplessness of working women. They must compete in the same offices and factories with women who are unable to protect themselves with proper laws. They must compete with women who work in unsanitary rooms called homes, work by dim lamps in the night, rocking a cradle with one foot. It is to the interest of all workers to end this stupid, one-sided, one-power arrangement and have suffrage for all.

The laws made by men rule the minds as well as the bodies of women. The man-managed state so conducts its schools that the ideals of women are warped to hideous shapes. Governments and schools engender and

nourish a militant public opinion that makes war always possible. Man-written history, fiction and poetry glorify war. Love of country is turned into patriotism which suggests drums, flags and young men eager to give their lives to the rulers of the nation. There will continue to be wars so long as our schools make such ideas prevail.

Women know the cost of human life in terms of suffering and sacrifice as men can never know it. I believe women would use the ballot to prevent war and to destroy the ideas that make war possible. In spite of an education that has taught them to glorify the military element in their ideals of manhood, they will wake to the realization that he loves his country best who lives for it and serves it faithfully. They will teach children to honor the heroes of peace above the heroes of war.

Women are even now more active in working for social legislation and laws affecting the schools, the milk supply and the quality of food than are the men who have the votes. Fundamentally, woman is a more social being than man. She is concerned with the whole family, while man is more individualistic. Social consciousness is not so strong in him. Many questions can be solved only with the help of woman's social experience--questions of the safety of women

in their work, the rights of little children. Yet her peculiar knowledge and abilities are made the basis of arguments against giving women the vote. It is indisputably true that woman is constituted for the purposes of maternity. So is man constituted for the purposes of paternity? But no one seems to think that incapacitates him for citizenship. If there is a fundamental difference between man and woman, far be it from me to deny that it exists. It is all the more reason why her side should be heard.

For my part, I should think that man's chivalrous nature would cause him to emancipate the weaker half of the race. Indeed, it seems strange that when he was getting the suffrage for himself it did not occur to him to divide up with his beloved partner. Looking closer, I almost detect a suspicion of tyranny in his attitude toward her on the suffrage question. And can it be that this tyranny wears the mask of chivalry? Please do not misunderstand me. I am not disparaging chivalry. It is a very fine thing--what there is of it. The trouble is, there is not enough to go around. Nearly all the opportunities, educational and political, that woman has acquired have been gained by a march of conquest with a skirmish at every post.

So since masculine chivalry has failed us we must hustle a bit and see what we can do

for ourselves--and the men who need our suffrage. First of all, we must organize. We must make ourselves so aggressive a political factor that our natural protectors can no longer deny us a voice in directing and shaping the laws under which we must live.

We shall not see the end of capitalism and the triumph of democracy until men and women work together in the solving of their political, social and economic problems. I realize that the vote is only one of many weapons in our fight for the freedom of all. But every means is precious and, equipped with the vote, men and women together will hasten the day when the age-long dream of liberty, equality and brotherhood shall be realized upon earth.

**First Published:** *New York Call*, October 17, 1913

**Source:** Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years (International Publishers, 1967)

# New Vision for the Blind

I have visited sweatshops, factories, crowded slums of New York and Washington. Of course I could not see the squalor; but if I could not see it, I could smell it.

With my own hands I could feel pinched, dwarfed children tending their younger brothers and sisters, while their mothers tended machines in nearby factories.

Besides the advantages of books and of personal experience, I have the advantage of a mind trained to think. In most people I talked with thought is infantile. In the well educated it is rare. In time their minds become automatic machines.

People do not like to think. If one thinks, one must reach conclusions; and conclusions are not always pleasant. They are a thorn in the spirit. But I consider it a priceless gift and a deep responsibility to think.

When we inquire why things are as they are, the answer is, the foundation of society is laid upon a basis of individualism, conquest and exploitation, with a total disregard of the good of the whole.

The structure of a society built upon such wrong basic principles is bound to retard the development of all men, even the most successful ones because it tends to divert man's energies into useless channels and to degrade his character. The result is a false standard of values. Trade and material prosperity are held to be the main objects of pursuit and conquest; the lowest instincts in human nature — love of gain, cunning and selfishness — are fostered.

The output of a cotton mill or a coal mine is considered of greater importance than the production of healthy, happy-hearted, free human beings.

Crushed, stupefied by terrible poverty, the workers yet demand that they shall have some of the beauty, some of the comforts, some of the luxuries which they have produced.

The time of blind struggle is drawing to a close. The forces governing the law of the survival of the fittest will continue to operate, but they will be under the conscious, intelligent control of man.

In all my reading I am conscious of a multitudinous discontent. Slowly man is waking up. The people — the great "common herd" — are finding out what is wrong with

the social, political and economical structure,  
the system of which they are a part.

This is not a time of gentleness, of timid beginnings that steal into life with soft apologies and dainty grace. It is a time for loud voiced, open speech and fearless thinking; a time of striving and conscious manhood, a time of all that is robust and vehement and bold; a time radiant with new ideals, new hopes of true democracy.

I love it, for it thrills me and gives me a feeling that I shall face great and terrible things. I am a child of my generation, and I rejoice that I live in such a splendidly disturbing time.

**First Published:** Justice (Pittsburgh, PA), October 25, 1913  
**Source:** Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years (International Publishers, 1967)

# **Brutal Treatment of the Unemployed in Sacramento Star**

I think their treatment was outrageous. It is not a crime to protest for your fellow. It is not a crime to be without bread.

They say that these men are IWW's and that means, "I Won't Work." I honor these men for their protest.

I am a socialist because I believe that socialism will solve the misery of the world — give work to the man who is hungry and idle and at least give to little children the right to be born free.

I believe socialism is practical.

You tell me these men out of work are unfit. Under socialism they will not be unfit because they will not be overtaxed. With the idle rich and the idle poor working and the work day four hours long their bodies will grow strong again and their minds sane.

There are so many in prisons who should be out — with their minds and bodies given a chance to grow straight. There are so many out of prison that more deserve to be

inside. There are those who enslave men and women and little children, paying wages that will not let them live.

It is them and the system under which they live that are responsible for the men who have been treated like inhuman things at Sacramento.

**Written:** (*Sacramento, CA*) March 16, 1914

**Source:** Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years (International Publishers, 1967)

# Menace of the Militarist Program

Speech at the Labor Forum, Washington  
Irving High School, New York City

The burden of war always falls heaviest on the toilers. They are taught that their masters can do no wrong, and go out in vast numbers to be killed on the battlefield. And what is their reward? If they escape death they come back to face heavy taxation and have their burden of poverty doubled. Through all the ages they have been robbed of the just rewards of their patriotism as they have been of the just reward of their labor.

The only moral virtue of war is that it compels the capitalist system to look itself in the face and admit it is a fraud. It compels the present society to admit that it has no morals it will not sacrifice for gain. During a war, the sanctity of a home and even of private property is destroyed. Governments do what it is said the "crazy Socialists" would do if in power.

In spite of the historical proof of the futility of war, the United States is preparing to raise a billion dollars and a million soldiers

in preparation for war. Behind the active agitators for defense you will find J.P. Morgan & Co., and the capitalists who have invested their money in shrapnel plants, and others that turn out implements of murder. They want armaments because they beget war, for these capitalists want to develop new markets for their hideous traffic.

I look upon the whole world as my fatherland, and every war has to me a horror of a family feud. I look upon true patriotism as the brotherhood of man and the service of all to all. The only fighting that saves is the one that helps the world toward liberty, justice and an abundant life for all.

To prepare this nation in the true sense of the word, not for war, but for peace and happiness, the State should govern every department of industry, health and education in such a way as to maintain the bodies and minds of the people in soundness and efficiency. Then, the nation will be prepared to withstand the demand to fight for a perpetuation of its own slavery at the bidding of a tyrant.

After all , the best preparedness is one that disarms the hostility of other nations and makes friends of them. Nothing is to be gained by the workers from war. They suffer all the miseries, while the rulers reap the

rewards. Their wages are not increased, nor their toil made lighter, nor their homes made more comfortable. The army they are supposed to raise can be used to break strikes as well as defend the people.

If the democratic measures of preparedness fall before the advance of a world empire, the worker has nothing to fear. No conqueror can beat down his wages more ruthlessly or oppress him more than his own fellow citizens of the capitalist world are doing. The worker has nothing to lose but his chains, and he has a world to win. He can win it at one stroke from a world empire. We must form a fully equipped, militant international union so that we can take possession of such a world empire.

This great republic is a mockery of freedom as long as you are doomed to dig and sweat to earn a miserable living while the masters enjoy the fruit of your toil. What have you to fight for? National independence? That means the masters' independence. The laws that send you to jail when you demand better living conditions? The flag? Does it wave over a country where you are free and have a home, or does it rather symbolize a country that meets you with clenched fists when you strike for better wages and shorter hours? Will you fight for your masters'

religion which teaches you to obey them even when they tell you to kill one another?

Why don't you make a junk heap of your masters' religion, his civilization, his kings and his customs that tend to reduce a man to a brute and God to a monster? Let there go forth a clarion call for liberty. Let the workers form one great world-wide union, and let there be a globe-encircling revolt to gain for the workers true liberty and happiness.

*Spoken: December 19, 1915 Source: Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years (International Publishers, 1967)*

# Strike Against War

To begin with, I have a word to say to my good friends, the editors, and others who are moved to pity me. Some people are grieved because they imagine I am in the hands of unscrupulous persons who lead me astray and persuade me to espouse unpopular causes and make me the mouthpiece of their propaganda. Now, let it be understood once and for all that I do not want their pity; I would not change places with one of them. I know what I am talking about. My sources of information are as good and reliable as anybody else's. I have papers and magazines from England, France, Germany and Austria that I can read myself.

Not all the editors I have met can do that. Quite a number of them have to take their French and German second hand. No, I will not disparage the editors. They are an overworked, misunderstood class. Let them remember, though, that if I cannot see the fire at the end of their cigarettes, neither can they thread a needle in the dark. All I ask, gentlemen, is a fair field and no favor. I have entered the fight against preparedness and against the economic system under which we live. It is to be a fight to the finish, and I ask no quarter.

The future of the world rests in the hands of America. The future of America rests on the backs of 80,000,000 working men and women and their children. We are facing a grave crisis in our national life. The few who profit from the labor of the masses want to organize the workers into an army which will protect the interests of the capitalists. You are urged to add to the heavy burdens you already bear the burden of a larger army and many additional warships. It is in your power to refuse to carry the artillery and the dreadnoughts and to shake off some of the burdens, too, such as limousines, steam yachts and country estates. You do not need to make a great noise about it. With the silence and dignity of creators you can end wars and the system of selfishness and exploitation that causes wars. All you need to do to bring about this stupendous revolution is to straighten up and fold your arms.

We are not preparing to defend our country. Even if we were as helpless as Congressman Gardner says we are, we have no enemies foolhardy enough to attempt to invade the United States. The talk about attack from Germany and Japan is absurd. Germany has its hands full and will be busy with its own affairs for some generations after the European war is over.

With full control of the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, the allies failed to land enough men to defeat the Turks at Gallipoli; and then they failed again to land an army at Salonica in time to check the Bulgarian invasion of Serbia. The conquest of America by water is a nightmare confined exclusively to ignorant persons and members of the Navy League.

Yet, everywhere, we hear fear advanced as argument for armament. It reminds me of a fable I read. A certain man found a horseshoe. His neighbor began to weep and wail because, as he justly pointed out, the man who found the horseshoe might someday find a horse. Having found the shoe, he might shoe him. The neighbor's child might someday go so near the horse's hells as to be kicked, and die. Undoubtedly the two families would quarrel and fight, and several valuable lives would be lost through the finding of the horseshoe. You know the last war we had we quite accidentally picked up some islands in the Pacific Ocean which may someday be the cause of a quarrel between ourselves and Japan. I'd rather drop those islands right now and forget about them than go to war to keep them. Wouldn't you?

Congress is not preparing to defend the people of the United States. It is planning to protect the capital of American speculators

and investors in Mexico, South America, China, and the Philippine Islands. Incidentally this preparation will benefit the manufacturers of munitions and war machines.

Until recently there were uses in the United States for the money taken from the workers. But American labor is exploited almost to the limit now, and our national resources have all been appropriated. Still the profits keep piling up new capital. Our flourishing industry in implements of murder is filling the vaults of New York's banks with gold. And a dollar that is not being used to make a slave of some human being is not fulfilling its purpose in the capitalistic scheme. That dollar must be invested in South America, Mexico, China, or the Philippines.

It was no accident that the Navy League came into prominence at the same time that the National City Bank of New York established a branch in Buenos Aires. It is not a mere coincidence that six business associates of J.P. Morgan are officials of defense leagues. And chance did not dictate that Mayor Mitchel could appoint to his Committee of Safety a thousand men that represent a fifth of the wealth of the United States. These men want their foreign investments protected.

Every modern war has had its root in exploitation. The Civil War was fought to

decide whether to slaveholders of the South or the capitalists of the North should exploit the West. The Spanish-American War decided that the United States should exploit Cuba and the Philippines. The South African War decided that the British should exploit the diamond mines. The Russo-Japanese War decided that Japan should exploit Korea. The present war is to decide who shall exploit the Balkans, Turkey, Persia, Egypt, India, China, and Africa. And we are whetting our sword to scare the victors into sharing the spoils with us. Now, the workers are not interested in the spoils; they will not get any of them anyway.

The preparedness propagandists have still another object, and a very important one. They want to give the people something to think about besides their won unhappy condition. They know the cost of living is high, wages are low, employment is uncertain and will be much more so when the European call for munitions stops. No matter how hard and incessantly the people work, they often cannot afford the comforts of life; many cannot obtain the necessities.

Every few days we are given a new war scare to lend realism to their propaganda. They have had us on the verge of war over the Lusitania, the Gulf light, the Ancona, and now they want the workingmen to become excited

over the sinking of the Persia. The workingman has no interest in any of these ships. The Germans might sink every vessel on the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, and kill Americans with everyone--the American workingman would still have no reason to go to war.

All the machinery of the system has been set in motion. Above the complaint and din of the protest from the workers is heard the voice of authority.

"Friends," it says, "fellow workmen, patriots; your country is in danger! There are foes on all sides of us. There is nothing between us and our enemies except the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean. Look at what has happened to Belgium. Consider the fate of Serbia. Will you murmur about low wages when your country, your very liberties, is in jeopardy? What are the miseries you endure compared to the humiliation of having a victorious German army sail up the East River? Quit your whining, get busy and prepare to defend your firesides and your flag. Get an army, get a navy; be ready to meet the invaders like the loyal-hearted freemen you are."

Will the workers walk into this trap? Will they be fooled again? I am afraid so. The people have always been amenable to oratory

of this sort. The workers know they have no enemies except their masters. They know that their citizenship papers are no warrant for the safety of themselves or their wives and children. They know that honest sweat, persistent toil and years of struggle bring them nothing worth holding on to, worth fighting for. Yet, deep down in their foolish hearts they believe they have a country. Oh blind vanity of slaves!

The clever ones, up in the high places know how childish and silly the workers are. They know that if the government dresses them up in khaki and gives them a rifle and starts them off with a brass band and waving banners, they will go forth to fight valiantly for their own enemies. They are taught that brave men die for their country's honor.

What a price to pay for an abstraction--the lives of millions of young men; other millions crippled and blinded for life; existence made hideous for still more millions of human being; the achievement and inheritance of generations swept away in a moment--and nobody better off for all the misery! This terrible sacrifice would be comprehensible if the thing you die for and call country fed, clothed, housed and warmed you, educated and cherished your children. I think the workers are the most unselfish of the children

of men; they toil and live and die for other people's country, other people's sentiments, other people's liberties and other people's happiness!

The workers have no liberties of their own; they are not free when they are compelled to work twelve or ten or eight hours a day. They are not free when they are ill paid for their exhausting toil. They are not free when their children must labor in mines, mills and factories or starve, and when their women may be driven by poverty to lives of shame. They are not free when they are clubbed and imprisoned because they go on strike for a raise of wages and for the elemental justice that is their right as human beings.

We are not free unless the men who frame and execute the laws represent the interests of the lives of the people and no other interest. The ballot does not make a free man out of a wage slave. There has never existed a truly free and democratic nation in the world. From time immemorial men have followed with blind loyalty the strong men who had the power of money and of armies. Even while battlefields were piled high with their own dead they have tilled the lands of the rulers and have been robbed of the fruits of their labor. They have built palaces and

pyramids, temples and cathedrals that held no real shrine of liberty.

As civilization has grown more complex the workers have become more and more enslaved, until today they are little more than parts of the machines they operate. Daily they face the dangers of railroad, bridge, skyscraper, freight train, stokehold, stockyard, lumber raft and min. Panting and training at the docks, on the railroads and underground and on the seas, they move the traffic and pass from land to land the precious commodities that make it possible for us to live. And what is their reward? A scanty wage, often poverty, rents, taxes, tributes and war indemnities.

The kind of preparedness the workers want is reorganization and reconstruction of their whole life, such as has never been attempted by statesmen or governments. The Germans found out years ago that they could not raise good soldiers in the slums so they abolished the slums. They saw to it that all the people had at least a few of the essentials of civilization--decent lodging, clean streets, wholesome if scanty food, proper medical care and proper safeguards for the workers in their occupations. That is only a small part of what should be done, but what wonders that one step toward the right sort of preparedness has wrought for Germany! For eighteen months it

has kept itself free from invasion while carrying on an extended war of conquest, and its armies are still pressing on with unabated vigor. It is your business to force these reforms on the Administration. Let there be no more talk about what a government can or cannot do. All these things have been done by all the belligerent nations in the hurly-burly of war. Every fundamental industry has been managed better by the governments than by private corporations.

It is your duty to insist upon still more radical measure. It is your business to see that no child is employed in an industrial establishment or mine or store, and that no worker is needlessly exposed to accident or disease. It is your business to make them give you clean cities, free from smoke, dirt and congestion. It is your business to make them pay you a living wage. It is your business to see that this kind of preparedness is carried into every department on the nation, until everyone has a chance to be well born, well nourished, rightly educated, intelligent and serviceable to the country at all times.

Strike against all ordinances and laws and institutions that continue the slaughter of peace and the butcheries of war. Strike against war, for without you no battles can be fought. Strike against manufacturing shrapnel and gas

bombs and all other tools of murder. Strike against preparedness that means death and misery to millions of human being. Be not dumb, obedient slaves in an army of destruction. Be heroes in an army of construction.

*Spoken: Speech at Carnegie Hall, New York City, January 5, 1916, under the auspices of the Women's Peace Party and the Labor Forum* **Source:** Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years (International Publishers, 1967)

# Why I Became an IWW

I asked that Miss Keller relate the steps by which she turned into the uncompromising radical who now faces the world as Helen Keller, not the sweet sentimentalist of woman's magazine days.

"I was religious to start with," she began in enthusiastic acquiescence to my request. "I had thought blindness a misfortune."

"Then I was appointed on a commission to investigate the conditions among the blind. For the first time I, who had thought blindness a misfortune beyond human control, found that too much of it was traceable to wrong industrial conditions, often caused by the selfishness and greed of employers.

And the social evil contributed its share. I found that poverty drove women to the life of shame that ended in blindness. "Then I read H.G. Wells' Old Worlds for New, summaries of Karl Marx's philosophy and his manifestoes. It seemed as if I had been asleep and waked to a new world--a world so different from the beautiful world I had lived in. "For a time I was depressed"--her voice saddened in reminiscence--"but little by little

my confidence came back and I realized that the wonder is not that conditions are so bad, but that humanity has advanced so far in spite of them. And now I am in the fight to change things. I may be a dreamer, but dreamers are necessary to make facts!" her voice almost shrilled in its triumph, and her hand found and clutched my knee in vibrant emphasis.

"And you feel happier than in the beautiful make-believe world you had dreamed?" I questioned.

"Yes," she answered with firm finality in the voice which stumbles a little. "Reality even when it is sad is better than illusions." (This from a woman whom it would seem all earthy things are but that.) "Illusions are at the mercy of any winds that blow. Real happiness much some from within, from a fixed purpose and faith in one's fellow men--and of that I have more than I ever had."

"And all this had to come after you left college? Did you get none of this knowledge of life at college?"

"No!"--an emphatic, triumphant, almost terrifying denial--"college isn't the place to go for any ideas. "I thought I was going to college to be educated," she resumed as she composed herself, and laughing more lightly, "I am an example of the education dealt out to present

generations. It's a deadlock. Schools seem to love the dead past and live in it."

"But you know, don't you," I pleaded through Mrs. Macy and for her, "that the intentions of your teachers were of the best."

"But they amounted to nothing," she countered. "They did not teach me about things as they are today, or about the vital problems of the people. They taught me Greek drama and Roman history, the celebrated achievements of war rather than those of the heroes of peace. For instance, there were a dozen chapters on war where there were a few paragraphs about the inventors, and it is this overemphasis of the cruelties of life that breeds the wrong ideal. Education taught me that it was a finer thing to be a Napoleon than to create a new potato. "It is my nature to fight as soon as I see wrongs to be made right. So after I read Wells and Marx and learned what I did, I joined a Socialist branch. I made up my mind to do something. And the best thing seemed to join a fighting party and help their propaganda. That was four years ago. I have been an industrialist since."

"An industrialist?" I asked, surprised out of composure. "You don't mean an IWW--a syndicalist?"

"I became an IWW because I found out that the Socialist party was too slow. It is sinking in the political bog. It is almost, if not quite, impossible for the party to keep its revolutionary character so long as it occupies a place under the government and seeks office under it. The government does not stand for interests the Socialist party is supposed to represent."

Socialism, however, is a step in the right direction, she conceded to her dissenting hearers.

"The true task is to unite and organize all workers on an economic basis, and it is the workers themselves who must secure freedom for themselves, who must grow strong." Miss Keller continued. "Nothing can be gained by political action. That is why I became an IWW."

"What particular incident led you to become an IWW?" I interrupted.

"The Lawrence strike. Why? Because I discovered that the true idea of the IWW is not only to better conditions, to get them for all people, but to get them at once."

"What are you committed to--education or revolution?"

"Revolution" She answered decisively.  
"We can't have education without revolution.

We have tried peace education for 1,900 years and it has failed. Let us try revolution and see what it will do now. "I am not for peace at all hazards. I regret this war, but I have never regretted the blood of the thousands spilled during the French Revolution. And the workers are learning how to stand alone. They are learning a lesson they will apply to their own good out in the trenches.

Generals testify to the splendid initiative the workers in the trenches take. if they can do that for their masters you can be sure they will do that for themselves when they have taken matters into their own hands. "And don't forget workers are getting their discipline in the trenches," Miss Keller continued. "They are acquiring the will to combat." My cause will emerge from the trenches stronger than it ever was. Under the obvious battle waging there, there is an invisible battle for the freedom of man."

Again the advisability of printing all this here set forth. And this finally from the patience-exhausted, gentle little woman: "I don't give a damn about semi-radicals!"

Gradually, through the talk, Helen Keller's whole being had taken on a glow, and it was in keeping with the exalted look on her face and the glory in her sightless blue eyes that she told me:

"I feel like Joan of Arc at times. My whole becomes uplifted. I, too, hear the voices that say 'Come' and I will follow, no matter what the cost, no matter what the trials I am placed under. Jail, poverty, calumny--they matter not. Truly He has said, 'Woe unto you that permits the least of mine to suffer.'"

**First Published:** An interview written by Barbara Bindley published in the New York Tribune, January 16, 1916  
**Source:** Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years (International Publishers, 1967)

# **Letter to Morris Hillquit**

(Socialist Party candidate for Mayor of  
New York City)

I have refrained from writing, or giving utterance to the fierce protest in my heart against the war madness that is sweeping away the reason and common sense of our people, because I believed that President Wilson would defend our liberties and stay with his strong hand the forces that are invading them. I have waited and waited for some word from the White House. I have prayed and hoped against hope that today, tomorrow or next day the newspapers would contain a rebuke that would bring the nation back to sanity and tolerance.

I have read and read President Wilson's own lofty utterance about freedom, justice and the rights of the people against the rights of governments. I thought he must realize that the Trading with the Enemy Act does not differ essentially from the drastic measure which the Federalists of 1798 rushed through Congress. In the quiet of his study he wrote that the Sedition Act cut perilously near the root of freedom of speech and of the press. He saw clearly that there was no telling where such power would stop. Who can tell where

the power given by the Trading With the Enemy Act will stop--an act that makes the Postmaster General absolute dictator over the press, an act that renders it impossible for any publication criticizing any measure of the government to circulate through the mails, be sent by express or freight, or sold...

Now you know, and the voters of New York know, when they are in their right minds, that it is neither treasonable nor seditious to criticize any statute or law. Nor is it treasonable to agitate for the repeal of any act. We are within our constitutional rights as citizens to agitate for the abolition of conscription. Why should we give up the best things we have, freedom of speech, of the press and of assemblage and establish Kaiserism in this country while we send our armies to destroy it in Europe? I am not discussing the war, its causes, its origin, its righteousness or unrighteousness, or whether the Christian spirit is eternally opposed to it or not.

I am not opposed to war for sentimental reasons. The blood of fighting ancestors flows in my veins. I would gladly see our young men go forth to battle if I thought it was a battle for true freedom. I would gladly participate in a war that would really make the world safe for democracy. By making the

world safe for democracy I do not mean simply to put down autocracy in Germany...

I do not know if your election would bring about a speedy peace. But I do know that it would encourage us to look forward to a people's peace--a peace without victory, a peace without conquests or indemnities. I would that a large vote cast for you would be a strong protest against the Prussian militarism that is taking possession of our government.

It would be an unequivocal denial that New York City stands for the kind of democracy that prevails here just now, a democracy where freedom of assemblage is denied the people, a democracy where armed officials behave like thugs, forcibly dispersing meetings, burning literature and clubbing the people; a democracy where workingmen are arrested and imprisoned for exercising their right to strike, a democracy where the miners of Bisbee were torn from their homes, huddled in freight cars like cattle, flung upon a desert without food or water and left to die; a democracy where Negroes may be massacred and their property burned, as was done in East St. Louis; a democracy where lynching and child labor are tolerated, a democracy where a minister who follows the feet of the Messenger of Peace beautiful upon the earth was flogged almost to death, and the only comment of the

press upon this outrage was a series of facetious remarks, and a half-concealed approval of the "hot-headed Kentuckians whose earnestness and patriotism carried them a little too far."

If I had the right to vote, I would vote for you, Mr. Hillquit, because a vote for you would be a blow at the militarism that is one of the chief bulwarks of capitalism, and the day that militarism is undermined, capitalism will fall.

*First Published:* New York Call, November 5,  
*1917 Source:* Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years (International  
Publishers, 1967)

# What Is The IWW?

I am going to talk about the Industrial Workers of the World because they are so much in the public eye just now. They are probably the most hated and most loved organization in existence. Certainly they are the least understood and the most persistently misrepresented.

The Industrial Workers of the World is a labor union based on the class struggle. It admits only wage-earners, and acts on the principle of industrial unionism. Its battleground is the field of industry. The visible expression of the battle is the strike, the lock-out, the clash between employer and employed. It is a movement of revolt against the ignorance, the poverty, the cruelty that too many of us accept in blind content.

It was founded in 1905 by men of bitter experience in the labor struggle, and in 1909 it began to attract nation-wide attention. The McKees Rocks strike first brought it to notice. The textile strike of Lawrence, Massachusetts, the silk workers' strike of Paterson, New Jersey, and the miners' strike of Calumet, Michigan, made it notorious. Since 1909 it has been a militant force in America that employers have had to reckon with.

It differs from the trade unions in that it emphasizes the idea of one big union of all industries in the economic field. It points out that the trade unions as presently organized are an obstacle to unity among the masses, and that this lack of solidarity plays into the hands of their economic masters.

The IWW's affirm as a fundamental principle that the creators of wealth are entitled to all they create. Thus they find themselves pitted against the whole profit-making system. They declare that there can be no compromise so long as the majority of the working class lives in want while the master class lives in luxury. They insist that there can be no peace until the workers organize as a class, take possession of the resources of the earth and the machinery of production and distribution and abolish the wage system. In other words, the workers in their collectivity must own and operate all the essential industrial institutions and secure to each laborer the full value of his product.

It is for these principles, this declaration of class solidarity, that the IWWs are being persecuted, beaten, imprisoned, and murdered. If the capitalist class had the sense it is reputed to have, it would know that violence is the worst weapon that can be used against men

who have nothing to lose and the world to gain.

Let me tell you something about the IWWs as I see them. They are the unskilled, the ill-paid, the unnaturalized, and the submerged part of the working class. They are mostly composed of textile mill workers, lumber men, harvesters, miners, transport workers. We are told that they are "foreigners," "the scum of the earth," "dangerous."

Many of them are foreigners simply because the greater part of the unskilled labor in this country is foreign. "Scum of the earth?" Perhaps. I know they have never had a fair chance. They have been starved in body and mind, denied, exploited, driven like slaves from job to job. "Dangerous?" May be. They have endured countless wrongs and injuries until they are driven to rebellion. They know that the laws are for the strong, that they protect the class that owns everything. They know that in a contest with the workers, employers do not respect the laws, but quite shamelessly break them.

Witness the lynching of Frank Little in Butte; the flogging of 17 men in Tulsa; the forcible deportation of 1200 miners from Bisbee; the burning to death of women and little children in the tents of Ludlow, Colorado, and the massacre of workers in Trinidad. So

the IWWs respect the law only as a soldier respects an enemy! Can you find it in your hearts to blame them? I love them for their needs, their miseries, their endurance and their daring spirit. It is because of this spirit that the master class fears and hates them. It is because of this spirit that the poor and oppressed love them with a great love.

The oft-repeated charge that the Industrial Workers of the World is organized to hinder industry is false. It is organized in order to keep industries going. By organizing industrially they are forming the structure of the new society in the shell of the old.

Industry rests on the iron law of economic determination. All history reveals that economic interests are the strongest ties that bind men together. That is not because men's hearts are evil and selfish. It is only a result of the inexorable law of life. The desire to live is the basic principle that compels men and women to seek a more suitable environment, so that they may live better and more happily.

Now, don't you see, it is impossible to maintain an economic order that keeps wages practically at a standstill, while the cost of living mounts higher and even higher? Remember, the day will come when the tremendous activities of the war will subside.

Capitalism will inevitably find itself face to face with a starving multitude of unemployed workers demanding food or destruction of the social order that has starved them and robbed them of their jobs.

In such a crisis the capitalist class cannot save itself or its institutions. Its police and armies will be powerless to put down the last revolt. For man at last will take his own, not considering the cost. When that day dawns, if the workers are not thoroughly organized, they may easily become a blind force of destruction, unable to check their own momentum, their cry for justice drowned in a howl of rage. Whatever is good and beneficent in our civilization can be saved only by the workers. And the Industrial Workers of the World is formed with the object of carrying on the business of the world when capitalism is overthrown. Whether the IWW increases in power or is crushed out of existence, the spirit that animates it is the spirit that must animate the labor movement if it is to have a revolutionary function.

*First Published:* Speech at the New York City Civic Club,  
*January 1918* *Source:* Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years  
(International Publishers, 1967)

# In Behalf of the IWW

Down through the long weary years the will of the ruling class has been to suppress either the man or his message when they antagonized its interests. From the execution of the propagandist and the burning of books, down through the various degrees of censorship and expurgation to the highly civilized legal indictment and winking at mob crime by constituted authorities, the cry has ever been "crucify him!"

The ideas and activities of minorities are misunderstood and misrepresented. It is easier to condemn than to investigate. It takes courage to steer one's course through a storm of abuse and ignominy. But I believe that discussion of even the most bitterly controverted matters is demanded by our love of justice, by our sense of fairness and an honest desire to understand the problems that are rending society. Let us review the facts relating to the situation of the IWWs since the United States entered the war with the declared purpose to conserve the liberties of the free peoples of the world.

During the last few months, in Washington State, at Pasco and throughout the Yakima Valley, many IWW members have

been arrested without warrants, thrown into "bullpens" without access to attorney, denied bail and trial by jury, and some of them shot. Did any of the leading newspapers denounce these acts as unlawful, cruel, and undemocratic? No. On the contrary, most of them indirectly praised the perpetrators of these crimes for their patriotic service!

On August 1, 1917, in Butte, Montana, a cripple, Frank Little, a member of the executive board of the IWW was forced out of bed at three o'clock in the morning by masked citizens, dragged behind an automobile and hanged on a railroad trestle. Were the offenders punished? No. A high government official has publicly condoned this murder, thereby upholding lynch law and mob rule.

On the 12th of last July twelve hundred miners were deported from Bisbee, Arizona, without legal process. Among them were many who were not IWWs or even in sympathy with them. They were all packed into freight cars like cattle and flung upon the desert of New Mexico, where they would have died of thirst and hunger if an outraged society had not protested. President Wilson telegraphed the Governor of Arizona that it was a bad thing to do, and a commission was sent to investigate. But nothing has been

done. No measures have been taken to return the miners to their homes and families.

Last September 5, an army of officials raided every hall and office of the IWW from Maine to California. They rounded up 166 IWW officers, members and sympathizers, and now they are in jail in Chicago, awaiting trial on the general charge of conspiracy.

In a short time these men will be tried in a Chicago court. The newspapers will be full of stupid, if not malicious comments on their trial. Let us keep an open mind. Let us try to preserve the integrity of our judgment against the misrepresentation, ignorance and cowardice of the day. Let us refuse to yield to conventional lies and censure. Let us keep our hearts tender towards those who are struggling mightily against the greatest evils of the age. Who is truly indicted, they or the social system that has produced them? A society that permits the conditions, out of which the IWWs have sprung, stands self-condemned.

The IWW is pitted against the whole profit-making system. It insists that there can be no compromise so long as the majority of the working class lives in want, while the master class lives in luxury. According to its statement, "there can be no peace until the workers organize as a class, take possession of

the resources of the earth and the machinery of production and distribution, and abolish the wage-system." In other words, the workers in their collectivity must own and operate all the essential industrial institutions and secure to each laborer the full value of his produce. I think it is for this declaration of democratic purpose, and not for any wish to betray their country, that the IWW members are being persecuted, beaten, imprisoned and murdered.

Surely the demands of the IWW are just. It is right that the creators of wealth should own what they create. When shall we learn that we are related one to the other, that we are members of one body, that injury to one is injury to all? Until the spirit of love for our fellow-workers, regardless of race, color, creed or sex, shall fill the world, until the great mass of the people shall be filled with a sense of responsibility for each other's welfare, social justice cannot be attained, and there can never be lasting peace upon earth.

I know those men are hungry for more life, more opportunity. They are tired of the hollow mockery of mere existence in a world of plenty. I am glad of every effort that the workingmen make to organize. I realize that all things will never be better until they are organized, until they stand all together like

one man. That is my hope of world democracy. Despite their errors, their blunders and the ignominy heaped upon them, I sympathize with the IWWs. Their cause is my cause. While they are threatened and imprisoned, I am manacled. If they are denied a living wage, I too am defrauded. While they are industrial slaves, I cannot be free. My hunger is not satisfied while they are unfed. I cannot enjoy the good things of life that come to me while they are hindered and neglected.

The mighty mass movement of which they are a part is discernible all over the world. Under the fire of the great guns, the workers of all lands, becoming conscious of their class, are preparing to take possession of their own.

That long struggle in which they have successively won freedom of body from slavery and serfdom, freedom of mind from ecclesiastical despotism, and more recently a voice in government, has arrived at a new stage. The workers are still far from being in possession of themselves or their labor. They do not own and control the tools and materials which they must use in order to live, nor do they receive anything like the full value of what they produce. Workingmen everywhere are becoming aware that they are

being exploited for the benefit of others, and that they cannot be truly free unless they own themselves and their labor. The achievement of such economic freedom stands in prospect--and at no distant date--as the revolutionary climax of the age.

*First Published: The Liberator, March 1918*  
*Source: Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years (International*  
*Publishers, 1967)*

## To Eugene V. Debs

Of course, the Supreme Court has sustained the decision of the lower court in your case. To my mind, the decision has added another laurel to your wreath of victories. Once more you are going to prison for upholding the liberties of the people.

I write because my heart cries out, and will not be still. I write because I want you to know that I should be proud if the Supreme Court convicted me of abhorring war, and doing all in my power to oppose it. When I think of the millions who have suffered in all the wicked wars of the past, I am shaken with the anguish of a great impatience. I want to fling myself against all bruite powers that destroy life and break the spirit of man.

In the persecution of our comrades there is one satisfaction. Every trial of men like you, every sentence against them, tears away the veil that hides the face of the enemy. The discussion and agitation that follows the trials define more sharply the positions that must be taken before all men can live together in peace, happiness and security.

We were driven into the war for liberty, democracy and humanity. Behold what is

happening all over the world today! Oh, where is the swift vengeance of Jehovah, that it does not fall upon the hosts of those who are marshalling machine guns against hunger-stricken people? It is the complacency of madness to call such acts "preserving law and order." Law and order! What oceans of blood and tears are shed in their name! I have come to loathe traditions and institutions that take away the rights of the poor and protect the wicked against judgment.

The wise fools who sit in the high places of justice fail to see that, in revolutionary times like the present, vital issues are settled, not by statutes, decrees and authorities, but in spite of them. Like the Girondins of France, they imagine that force can check the onrush of revolution. Thus they sow the wind, and unto them shall be the harvest of the whirlwind.

You dear comrade! I have long loved you because you are an apostle of brotherhood and freedom. For years I have thought of you as a dauntless explorer going towards the dawn and, like a humble adventurer, I have followed in the trail of your footsteps. From time to time the greetings that have come back to me from you have made me very happy, and now I reach out my hand and clasp yours through prison bars.

With heartfelt greetings and with a firm faith that the cause for which you are now martyred shall be all the stronger because of your sacrifice and devotion, I am,

Yours for the revolution--may it come swiftly, like a shaft sundering the dark!

**First Published:** New York Call, April 29, 1919; Appeal to Reason, May 17, 1919 **Source:** Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years (International Publishers, 1967)

# **End the Blockade of Soviet Russia!**

I am glad to join the People's Freedom Union and other friends of liberty in condemnation of the blockade of Russia by Japan, Great Britain, France and the United States of America. This outrage upon a people who are trying to work out their form of government, their ideas of life, upon their own territory, is one of the blackest crimes in history. The allied and associated governments which are guilty of this infamy violate every principle of civilization, every rule of common honesty.

For our governments are not honest. They do not openly declare war against Russia and proclaim the reasons. They are fighting the Russian people half-secretly and in the dark with the lie of democracy on their lips and the indirect weapon of the blockade in their hands.

We cannot remain silent while the government for which we are partly responsible assists in starving women, children and old people because, forsooth, our political rulers and perhaps a majority of the American public do not approve the ideas which underlie Russia's experiment in a new type of society.

No thinking American can be silent, can fail to be on one side or the other. There can be no middle ground. Those who are not for fair play to Russia, for the removal of all alien soldiers from Russian soil, for the lifting of the blockade, are Russia's enemies. And Russia's enemies are the friends and upholders of Czarism, of oppression, of exploitation, of the plunder of one people by another. Silence in this case is not neutrality in a mere problem of politics and trade. Every word of sympathy for the men, women and children of Russia, whom the allied governments are trying to starve into submission to the interests behind those governments, is a word on the side of humanity and progress.

What quarrel have our people with the Russian people? We may disagree with their ideals and we have a right to disagree. If their ideals are not ours, we need have no fear of them, for they cannot supplant our own ideals, whatever our own may be.

Has the truth been told about Russia? The whole truth cannot be known because it is too vast and complicated and involves rapidly developing events. But have not our people been deliberately supplied with falsifications appealing to their fears and their prejudices to make them hostile to Russia and its present government?

Hold any opinion you may happen to hold about Russia and its government. It is wrong to attack Russia without an open declaration of war and an avowal of the true causes. That is simply honest politics in accordance with the Constitution of the United States.

Above the Constitution and the laws of politicians are the laws of humanity, justice and right, embodied in the Declaration of Independence and so often eloquently invoked by President Wilson when he was urging us into a war against Germany with Russia as one of our Allies. And now Germany is being urged to join our Allies and associates in a war against Russia. Can all this shifting of alliances, this change of partners in a few months any longer deceive us?

We fought and helped win a war to make the world safe for democracy, for ideals. That war is finished and our ideals are, of course, established. What ideal is served by this war, this actual war against Russia, denied by the State Department and carried on by the War Department? And of the generous vocabulary of liberty and justice and humanity which has been strained and worn during the past few years, what is left to apply to this war to make it seem right to the heart and conscience of Americans?

It is not enough to express our feelings about the treatment which our government is according Russia. It is not enough to defend one part of democracy. All democracy must stand together. All humanity must be humanitarian or all will perish. We cannot divorce an unrighteous intervention in Russia, nor the attack of France and Rumania on Hungary, from the theft of Shantung. For they are only specific evils in a world-wide evil, and we must cure them to maintain ourselves and all mankind in health and happiness. We must oppose hypocrisy, greed, murder, wherever we find them in order to save ourselves and the rest of humanity. If the President and his administration will not apply to Russia and to every other country, including the United States of America, the principles which he has expressed over and over again, we must bring pressure to bear upon our government. We must appeal to the citizens of America to regard with suspicion the news from and about Russia which is printed for them every day, and to demand the enforcement of the President's own proposition that every nation has a right to govern itself, to self-determination.

*First Published: New York Call, November 10, 1919  
: Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years (International Publishers,  
1967)*

# Help Soviet Russia

I love Russia and all who stand loyally by her in her mighty wrestlings with the giant powers of ignorance and imperialist greed. When I first heard of the glorious words, "Soviet Republic of Russia," it was as if a new light shone through my darkness. I felt that the sun of a better day had risen upon the world. Those glowing, hope-inspiring words, "Soviet Republic of Russia," meant that at last the principles of truth, justice and brotherhood had gained a foothold upon earth, and this thought has run like a shingling furrow through the dark years that have intervened.

We have witnessed Russia's superhuman struggle in a world blinded by avarice and calumny. But despite intrigues and blockades and the wicked misinterpretations of a stupid, dishonest press, she stands today firmly entrenched in her just cause, while the old social order is collapsing at her feet.

Oh, why cannot the workers see that the cause of Russia is their cause? Her struggle for economic freedom is their struggle, her perishing children are their children, and her dreams, her aspirations, her martyrdom and victories are an internal part of the workers' campaign for a better, saner world. Why can

they not understand that their own best instincts are in revolt against a social order which entrals masses of men and leads inevitably to poverty, suffering and war? How spiritually blind are men that they fail to see that we are all bound together! We rise or fall together, we are dwarfed or godlike, free or chained together.

If the workers would only use their minds a little, instead of letting others do their thinking for them, they would see quickly through the flimsy arguments of the newspapers they read. They are told that the famine in Russia is caused by "Marxian socialism," and that four years of Bolshevism have brought Russia to the doors of the world begging for bread. If that is true, what has caused the famine in China?

What is the cause of undernourishment in some of our southern states? And what is the cause of unemployment throughout this great, rich land? Begging for bread is not uncommon within the capitalistic nations, and these days we hear a great deal of soup kitchens and the bread line. These phenomena occur even in times which the newspapers are accustomed to speak of as "prosperous."

The famine in Russia is the result of a drought following years of war and a long imperialistic blockade of Russian ports,

preventing entrance to them of all necessary supplies. This is the plain truth. Yet millions of sensible men and women have been deceived about conditions in Russia. But I trust that the good sense of the American people will soon surmount the wall of calumnies and prejudices which now prevents friendly relations between the two countries. Through the mist of tears and sweat and blood of struggling men I salute her and wish for her the love of an awakened and grateful humanity.

Here is a thought that keeps singing in my mind but will not fold its wings for the formal limits of a letter: Great, O Russia, is thy task! Thine is the race immortal whose beams shall spread across the earth, wide as the wings of heaven, bright as the morning light. Lift high thy flaming torch wherever men are slaves! Breathe upon them the life-quickenings fires of thy creative mind. Give them the potent red light of thy courage that they may look upon the faces of comrades in every land, and be to all their kind dear friends and neighbors. Then shall all men discover thee, a paradise upon the verge of doom.

*First Published: The Toiler, November 19, 1921  
Source: Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years*

# The Spirit of Lenin

I think that every honest belief should be treated with fairness, yet I cry out against people who uphold the empire of gold. I am aware of moods when the perfect state of peace, brotherhood and universal love seems so far off that I turn to division, pugnacity and the pageant of war. I am just like St. Paul when he says, "I delight in the Law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind." I am perfectly sure that love will bring everything right in the end, but I cannot help sympathizing with the oppressed who feel driven to use force to gain the rights that belong to them.

That is one reason why I have turned with such interest toward the great experiment now being tried in Russia. [No revolution was ever a sudden outbreak of lawlessness and wreckage incited by an unholy brood of cranks, anarchists and pedagogues.] People turn to a revolution only when every other dream has faded into the dimness of sorrow. [When we look upon these mighty disturbances which seem to leap so suddenly out of the troubled depths we find that they were fed by little streams of discontent and oppression. These

little streams which have their source deep down in the miseries of the common people all flow together at last in a retributive flood.

The Russian Revolution did not originate with Lenin. It had hovered for centuries in the dreams of Russian mystics and patriots, but when the body of Lenin was laid in simple state in the Kremlin, all Russia trembled and wept. The mouths of hungry enemies fed on new hopes, but the spirit of Lenin descended upon the weeping multitude as with cloven tongues of fire, and they spoke one to another and were not afraid.

"Let us not follow him with cowering hearts," they said, "let us rather gird ourselves for the task he has left us. Where our dull eyes see only ruin, his clearer sight discovers the road by which we shall gain our liberty. Revolution he sees, yea, and even disintegration which symbolizes disorder is in truth the working of God's undeviating order; and the manner of our government shall be no less wonderful than the manner of our deliverance. If we are steadfast, the world will be quickened to courage by our deeds."

Men vanish from earth leaving behind them the furrows they have ploughed. I see the furrow Lenin left sown with the unshatterable seed of a new life for mankind, and cast deep

below the rolling tides of storm and lightning,  
mighty crops for the ages to reap.

*First Published: Midstream: My Later Life, 1929*

*Source: Helen Keller: Her Socialist Years (International  
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MANY HEARING PEOPLE, MARXISTS INCLUDED, ARE FAMILIAR WITH HELEN KELLER IN ONE OF TWO WAYS. EITHER WE SEE HER AS THE WILD CHILD RESCUED FROM THE PRISON OF DEAFNESS AND BLINDNESS THROUGH THE HEROIC EFFORTS OF HER "MIRACLE WORKER" TEACHER, ANNE SULLIVAN; OR AS THE BUTT OF CRUEL "HELEN KELLER" JOKES. NEITHER IMAGE BEARS ANY RELATION TO THE ACTUAL, POLITICALLY ACTIVE DEAF/BLIND WOMAN WHOM THAT NEARLY MYTHICAL CHILD BECAME.

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